



Testimony of Melissa Hackett,  
Policy and Communications Associate, the Maine Children's Alliance  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety  
In Support of LD 759, An Act To Amend the Child Endangerment Laws To Include Certain Unauthorized  
Access to a Loaded Firearm  
April 21, 2021

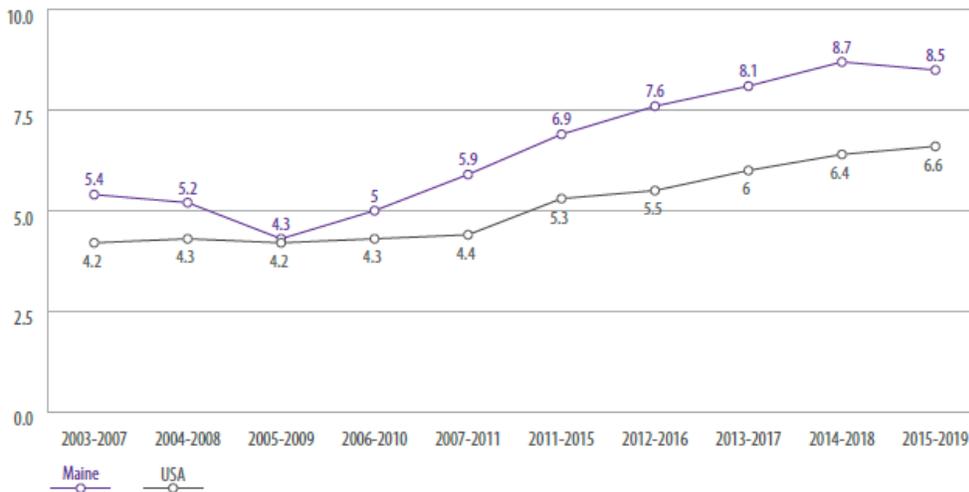
Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Melissa Hackett and I am offering testimony on behalf of the Maine Children's Alliance strongly in support of LD 759. The Maine Children's Alliance is a statewide, nonpartisan, research, and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound policies and best practices that improve the lives of Maine's children, youth, and families.

We all want our children to grow up healthy and to transition safely into adulthood. As parents, adults, and decisionmakers, it is our responsibility to take the necessary measures to keep them safe. When children and youth have access to firearms in homes, we risk exposing them to accidental death or injury that can be prevented through laws that establish safe storage practices for firearms.

We support this legislation to protect Maine children from injury and violence resulting from access to firearms in the home. Firearm injuries are an issue of public health, contributing substantially to premature death and disability of children. Firearm-related deaths are the third leading cause of death overall among U.S. children aged 1 to 17 years.<sup>i</sup> About 4.6 million children in the U.S. live in homes with firearms, and alarmingly, of these households, 43 percent contain at least one unlocked firearm.<sup>1</sup> Studies show that these unsecured guns are accessible to – and accessed by – young children, even when their parents believe they are not.<sup>2</sup>

Laws reducing child and youth access to firearms, including laws enforcing safe storage, are associated with lower overall adolescent suicide rates, which are of particular concern here in Maine. A 2018 brief from the Maine CDC found that firearms were used in more than half (52 percent) of all suicide deaths between 2014-2016.<sup>ii</sup> Although the number of suicides by teens varies each year, our [2021 Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book](#) includes that the average number of suicides per year for youth under age 20 in Maine was well above the national average.

## MAINE'S TEEN SUICIDE RATE CONTINUES TO BE ABOVE THE NATIONAL RATE



Sources: Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Vital Statistics and National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Center for Health Statistics. CDC WONDER Online Database

For a teenager going through a difficult time and considering suicide, reducing their access to a firearm can save their life. Nine out of ten suicide attempts with a gun result in death<sup>iii</sup>. But in contrast, most people who attempt suicide by other means live—and do not eventually die by suicide<sup>iv</sup>.

It is our job to protect the youth in our state. Responsible gun safety measures play a critical role in keeping Maine children and families safe. When firearms are not safely stored, there can be fatal unintentional consequences for young children in that home. When a teenager is struggling with a difficult experience, and they have easy access to a firearm, they are not safe. Our state can and should implement and enforce laws like this one that establish expectations that firearms should only be accessible and in the hands of responsible gun owners, to protect the health and safety of our youngest citizens.

Thank you.

<sup>i</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based injury statistics query and reporting system (WISQARS). 2005. [www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars)

<sup>1</sup> Deborah Azrael, Joanna Cohen, Carmel Salhi, and Matthew Miller, "Firearm Storage in Gun-owning Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey." *Journal of Urban Health* (2018): 1-10

<sup>2</sup> Frances Baxley & Matthew Miller, *Parental Misperceptions about Children and Firearms*, 160 ARCHIVES OF PEDIATRIC & ADOLESCENT MED. 542, 544 (2006)

<sup>l</sup> Maine Department of Health and Human Services/Center for Disease Control. Suicide in Maine: 2018 Update, A Data Brief: Lifespan (Ages 10+), <https://www.maine.gov/suicide/docs/Lifespan-Data-Brief-2018.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Miller, M, Azrael, D, and Hemenway D. The Epidemiology of Case Fatality Rates for Suicide in the Northeast. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*. 2004: 723-730. [https://mhdo.maine.gov/\\_externalreports/epidemiologyofcasefatalityrate.pdf](https://mhdo.maine.gov/_externalreports/epidemiologyofcasefatalityrate.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Owens D, Horrocks J, and House A. Fatal and non-fatal repetition of self-harm: systematic review. *British Journal of Psychiatry*. 2002;181:193-199